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STIEGLER, "IDEOLOGY", AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

LEXICON ALTHUSSER, ASIGNIFICANT SEMIOTICS, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, POST-STRUCTURALISM

In his book *PHARMACOLOGIE DU FRONT NATIONAL* (2013) Bernard Stiegler poses an interesting question: Why did post-structuralism cease to make use of the concept of ideology? This is a good question, in that critical discussion of "ideology" did not entirely disappear, as Stiegler seems to think, but explicit use of the term "ideology" did become rare in the works of post-structuralist thinkers. Stiegler's hypothesis is that in abandoning the term ideology they also abandoned the ideological struggle against what he calls the "ultraliberal ideology". This interpretation seems to me to be particularly wrong-headed.

In fact in the works of these thinkers (Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida), while they may not make explicit use of the word "ideology", the concept is there nonetheless but in a reconfigured problematic. For example, Foucault wanted to free both himself and us from the Althusserian idea of science, and more generally to free us of all demarcationist and structuralist ideas of science.

Expressed paradoxically, the poststructuralist idea is that there is something "ideological" or "metaphysical" in how the separation between science and ideology is conceived, and thus in our concept of science itself. This idea has gained substance and received more explicit attention thanks to work in the sociology of science and science studies (David Bloor, Bruno Latour, Andrew Pickering). Given the epistemological inadequacy of the metaphysical vision of science and also given the adverse political consequences of such a vision Foucault and other thinkers, such as Derrida and Deleuze and Lyotard, tried to look at epistemological and ideological formations from the outside, and turned to less formal notions such as micro-political apparatuses of power relations (Foucault) and assemblages of enunciation and desire (Deleuze and Guattari).

This vision from outside posed the question of its own source of legitimacy and efficacy, which explains Foucault's turn to techniques of the self to find a source that would not be a metaphysical foundation. Deleuze calls this turn the search for a relation to an outside that is further than any outside and more interior than any inside. This is what Deleuze calls the line of subjectivation and what I think can also be called, following Simondon (but also following Jung) a line of "individuation". Foucault himself talks about the post-universal theorist as speaking to others from the experience of a singular practice, which nicely captures the nature of individuation as both singular and collective.

Stiegler's hypothesis is erroneous both historically and hermeneutically.

A) On the historical error involved in Stiegler's discussion

Historically, it is just not true that explicit use of the word "ideology" was abandoned by everybody. Žižek and Badiou, for example, continued to make use of it to name a central notion in their own systems. Žižek defines ideology not as ideas but as the cognitive, affective, perceptive, and ethico-political framework that determines us to have certain sorts of ideas: "a set of explicit and implicit, even unspoken, ethico-political and other positions, decision, choices, etc., which predetermine our perception of facts, what we tend to emphasize or to ignore".

Ideology, on this acception, is not found at the level of explicit utterance so much as in pervasive attitudes and habitual comportment. This is why Žižek can claim that Chomsky's work though useful does not really come to terms with ideology: "If one defines and uses this term the way I do (and I am not alone here: my understanding echoes a long tradition of so-called Western Marxism), then one has to conclude that what Chomsky is doing in his political writings is very important, I have great admiration and respect for it, but it is emphatically not critique of ideology". It is not critique of ideology because it is limited to the critique of ideas, rather than of the frameworks and practices that make those ideas possible.

Yet it is true most poststructuralist Continental philosophers have avoided using the word "ideology" and prefer to express their critiques of frameworks, discourses and practices, and of the social formations they are embedded in, in other terms. To clarify matters I would like to give an account of diverse senses of ideology that we can find in Althusser, and then discuss Deleuze and Guattari's subsequent avoidance of the word. I distinguish three main senses of "ideology" as used by Althusser:

1) ideology as opposed to science, the opposite of science – this is the epistemological sense that comes most readily to mind. It is regrettable that in Continental Philosophy a direct confrontation with Althusser's positions on this sense of ideology never took place. This non-engagement with Althusser's dualist and demarcationist epistemology left the field free not just for scientism but also for the hegemony of technocrats and the tyranny of experts, and also for the primacy of management over politics. A distant consequence of this neglect has been the rise of Graham Harman's OOO packaged as contemporary Continental Philosophy when it is in fact its exact opposite, a regression to a form of Althusserism, only de-marxed, de-politicised, and de-scientised. The idea that ideology does not find an Other in science, and that both are constituted in assemblages of heterogeneous elements was proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (in RHIZOME, for example), but was left to the sociology of science to be worked out in detail.

2) ideology as structure of misrecognition – this is the sense that is taken up and reformulated in Deleuze's concept of the dogmatic image of thought as State-image. Here Althusser makes use of notions taken from Lacan's works to claim that there will never be any society free of ideology. Deleuze and Guattari have analysed this structure in A THOUSAND PLATEAUS in terms of conformist significations and subjugated subjects. But all these analyses in terms of the illusion of the One and of transcendence can be seen as part of their critique of ideology.

3) ideology not only as system of representations but also as integral part of state apparatuses. This is Žižek's sense in which ideology is not only the force of ideas but also a material force. Deleuze and Guattari accept this idea of the material inscription of desire, but ally it to Foucault's idea that the state is not a determining instance. This leads to the notion of ideology as inextricably structuring desiring assemblages. One could say that the idea that the State holds power is itself ideological. Following Foucault's lead Deleuze and Guattari preferred to abandon the word "ideology", but the concept itself remains present in diverse notions: dogmatic image of thought, plane of organisation, transcendence, and also in the notions of diagramme and abstract machine.

B) On the hermeneutical error involved in Stiegler's discussion

Why did post-structuralism cease to make use of the concept of ideology? Is there some generalised movement of "forgetting", as Stiegler supposes, that led to the weakening or to the abandon of the ideological struggle against capitalism's theoretical self-justifications and self-legitimations? I think that this is a misreading, and that Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault carried on "ideological critique" throughout their work, including after May '68. They did not participate in the neoliberal movement of forgetting ideology, but they were very critical of the binary opposition between « science » and « ideology ». They thus searched for a different terminology to allow them to pursue the critique of another modern ideology: scientism. It is true that Deleuze and Guattari state in RHIZOME that there is no *ideology*, but they also affirm that there is no *science* either, only assemblages. However assemblages are not all equal, for example some are more individuating (they speak in terms of processes of singularisation and of subjectivation) whereas others are disindividuating.

My historical hypothesis concerning the quasi-disappearance of the word « ideology » in the texts of Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard is that these philosophers, despite the relative effacement of the word "ideology", do not abandon the concept of ideology nor the battle against it. They continue to analyse ideology and to carry out an ideological critique. In trying to free themselves from the Althusserian notion of ideology, they produce and elaborate a different set of concepts in order to deconstruct the famous Althusserian binary opposition between science and ideology. This strategy, while comprehensible in its strategic intention to transform the concepts and the problematic by also transforming the vocabulary, is in danger of leading to an impasse, that of the impossibility of pursuing a critique of the ideology of scientism. However, the poststructural perspective goes much further than the narrow point of view of (structuralist) epistemology, which places all the impurity and enslavement on the side of ideology and all the purity and the liberation on the side of science (structuralist epistemology being demarcationist

and univocal, incapable of handling ambiguity).

This impasse is avoided in the case of Deleuze and Guattari. In their triad composed of collective assemblages of enunciation, of incorporeal transformations, and of machinic assemblages we can see the sketch of the triplicity that allows us to escape from the dualist trap. My question is: does our philosophical vocabulary, in order to be critical, need to contain the word "ideology" in an essential way, or would it not rather be a secondary term whose diverse meanings are better expressed by the vocabulary of assemblages and networks? Deleuze and Guattari give a positive answer to this question, and their so-called "forgetting" of ideology is in fact its replacement by a set of terms that are more specific, and less immersed in a marsh of deceptive connotations.

ANTI-OEDIPUS contains an application of a very sophisticated theory of ideology and its critique that is elaborated in its generality in A THOUSAND PLATEAUS. However, they do not make much use of the word "ideology" because of its dualist implications (the famous science/ideology distinction), but also because of the etymological association with "ideas", which would seem to assign ideology as a derivative phenomenon to the superstructure.

Once one accepts that ideology is embedded in frameworks and practices and not a phenomenon limited to ideas (as Althusser, and Žižek argue) one may wish to discard the word itself as misleading. This is what Deleuze and Guattari (and also Foucault and Lyotard) do. In relation to the concept of ideology, there is no rupture and "forgetting", but rather a continuity and an intensification of their previous work. In relation to the word "ideology" there is the alternative between abandoning and replacing it with more satisfactory terms (the solution of Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard) or of conserving the word but redefining it (Althusser, Žižek) so that it no longer refers to ideas alone.

This setting aside of the word "ideology" is not absolute. It becomes much rarer as a theoretical term, and serves as a simplified translation of more complex and more nuanced analyses. Obviously the phenomenon of ideology continues to exist for Deleuze and Guattari, but they do not limit its presence and impact to the superstructure, locating it at the deeper level of the libidinal assemblages. They make this connection between ideology and assemblages in RHIZOME ("There is no science and no ideology, there are only assemblages"), but at the same time they reject the word's dualist connotations in its opposition to science.

Guattari is even more explicit in LIGNES DE FUITE, written in 1979 but published in 2011. He argues that "Althusser has made ideology into a category that is too general, which includes and conflates semiotic practices that are radically heterogeneous" (143, my translation). He prefers to limit its meaning to semiotic processes that are linguistically coded, so as not to preclude the existence of other non-linguistically coded semiotic processes aligned with the formations of power. The goal remains the same: the analysis of our repressive institutions and practices with the aim of transforming them to permit greater freedom.

The important step is to get out of the idea of ideology as mere superstructure, a sort of passive reflection of what goes on in the economic base. Even if this picture can be complexified, as in Althusser's work, by notions of relative autonomy, non-expressive totalities, different sorts of contradictions, uneven development and heterogeneous phases co-present in the same structure, this more sophisticated picture still leads to trouble as long as we stick to the definition of ideology as (1) the Other of science (dualism knowledge-illusion), (2) an eternal and universal structure of misrecognition (dualism lived relation to the world-truth) and (3) a system of ideas (dualism superstructure-base).

This set of dualisms can't work because there is no magic criterion of demarcation to discern and attribute the status of scientificity or of truth on the one hand, and of illusion on the other. If we take ideology in the wider sense as the unawareness of the material (i.e. political, economic and technological) origins and/or conditions of our ideas (this sense is close to 2) then it becomes a more plausible notion, but it can no longer be the Other of science, and we have left the space of structuralist epistemology.

Having taken this step outside structuralist epistemology the poststructuralists began to accentuate the tension between their psychoanalytic and the structuralist influences. Structuralism was scientific and tended to read Lacan in a rationalist vein, but Lacan's vision of *misrecognition* as a systemic feature led the poststructuralists to see that even science had "ideological" features, hence the decomposition of the notion of ideology into sub-components, that are then conserved under other names, except for the polemical treatment of ideology as the other of science. But I think that poststructuralist French theory balked at a barrier that in other countries Science Studies breached. Foucault did genealogies of human sciences, but did not touch the natural sciences. Lyotard toyed with relativising the authority of the sciences but eventually just limited it to the cognitive domain, where he gave it unrivalled hegemony. Deleuze talked about 'nomad science' but it was more a content-level distinction than any heuristic analysis of the processes of construction of scientific results.

The Althusserian idea has certain advantages as situates ideology not just in ideas but as a structuring principle in practices and institutions, eg in the definition of roles and functions. It also adds the notion of a sort of systemic cognitive bias, or even blindness, concerning the factors that structure the very type of subjectivity pervading a society. All this is far more radical than the "Other of science" strand, which makes alchemy for example a case of ideology and chemistry a science. The problem is that by rejecting the crude binary demarcations of the last strand, theorists threw the baby out with the bathwater and lost sight of, or expressed more cryptically, the positive aspects of the two other strands of ideology as structuration of embodied practice and of ideology as misrecognition or cognitive blindness.

In conclusion, the substitution of a variety of more specific words for the over general word “ideology” has certain advantages for the pursuit of philosophical analyses. But it has deprived us of a single word to designate the various unities composed of these sub-parts. This has tended to give poststructuralist thought an allure of élitism, an aristocratic language only for the small circle of the initiated. In compensation certain figures have emerged whose thought is more approachable as they occupy a position halfway between structuralism and post-structuralism. One could call them demi-post-structuralists. Žižek is a good example of this, as since he is still stuck in the problematic space opened up by the Althusser-Lacan conjuncture, he has privileged Lacan as an alternative way out of structuralism, preferring to remain Lacanian in contrast to the more pluralist accounts of his immediate predecessors. Žižek is able to follow the analogical play of translation and of conceptual movement crossing boundaries between traditionally separate domains, but he retains Lacanian psychoanalysis as preferred language capable of specifying the cognitive content of all the variants.

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